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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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DEATH SQUADS IN EL SALVADOR

For the last few weeks, President Reagan and top figures in his Administration have gone to great lengths to denounce the death squads in El Salvador. Their carefully orchestrated remarks are years overdue, and, still worse, transparently insincere.

For the past two years, I, along with other members of Congress, have been calling attention to two facts. First of all, a major proportion of the civilian deaths in El Salvador result neither from left-wing guerillas or cross-fire. The deaths are the direct result of organized political executions carried out by armed right-wing bands known as death squads.

The central fact the Administration has ignored is that these death squads include members of the army, the National Guard, and the dreaded Security Police. They operate with the knowledge, approval, and, often, direct guidance of leaders in the Salvadoran government.

On his recent trip to San Salvador Vice President Bush, speaking in the name of President Reagan and the American people, warned the government that failure to control the death squads could result in loss of American public support. What sense does it make to ask a government whose personnel and activities are intertwined with those of the death squads to control the death squads?! It is like going to a city where the police are brutal and corrupt and asking the police force to clean up police brutality and corruption.

All of a sudden, the Reagan Administration has discovered what every newspaper-reading American has known for years: The Salvadoran death squads are openly supported by wealthy Salvadoran families both in El Salvador and in the United States. The Administration has threatened to cut off support coming from the U.S.

What impact will the Reagan crusade against the death squads have? President Reagan's remarks and those of his spokesmen will probably have no impact in El Salvador.

Shortly before Vice President Bush's dramatic trip to El Salvador, President Reagan vetoed a simple bill extending the law which required the President to assure Congress every six months that El Salvador was making progress on the human rights front. The "certification" was a condition for further aid.

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The situation has worsened to such a degree that this Administration, which has routinely certified progress without a second thought, feared having to do so again. Secretary of State George Schulz candidly admitted that he would have difficulty recommending to the President certification of civil rights progress at the end of the current six-month period. The fact is, things have gotten worse.

The people in power in El Salvador are not merely moderates or conservatives trying to repel Marxist revolutionaries. The ruling elite includes some of the most tyrannical and reactionary bullies in Latin America. Many journalists and diplomats believe that Robert d'Aubisson, the President of the Constituent Assembly, has been directly involved in death squad executions and continues to support murderous vigilantes. Former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, Robert White, publicly denounced d'Aubisson as a "pathological killer."

D'Aubisson and his buddies play a major role in the government. President Reagan is counting on to control the 'bad guys' in the death squads. Does this make sense?

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